

IMPROVING PUBLIC OPINION TO SUPPORT THE ALL- VOLUNTEER MILITARY

BY

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IMPROVING PUBLIC OPINION TO SUPPORT THE ALL-VOLUNTEER MILITARY

by

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ABSTRACT

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Improving public opinion of the military is vital to the future success of the all-volunteer military. Failure to sustain a positive public image may result in decreased accessions and the inability to complete the primary mission of the military – to defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign or domestic. Public opinion is an evolutionary cognitive process and there are many methods and opportunities to modify it. Among the methods explored in this document are waging a more aggressive public affairs campaign, increasing the exposure of the military to the public, and increasing pay and benefits to service members.

IMPROVING PUBLIC OPINION TO SUPPORT THE ALL-VOLUNTEER MILITARY

The future of the United States of America is contingent on the ability of its military forces to preserve a safe and secure environment. The mission of protecting this environment is comprehensive and extends beyond securing the sovereign national borders of the United States (US) to other countries because of strategic national interests which influence the American way of life. This task has become increasingly more difficult for the military due to national and international threats which have access to both conventional and non-conventional weapons as evidenced in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). In an effort to accomplish this comprehensive mission, the Department of Defense, with Congressional approval, may adjust the size and structure of the military on an annual basis. However, in order to secure the accessions required to achieve this goal, the military must continue to improve upon public opinion as it relates to supporting the all-volunteer military. The military should endeavor to improve its public perception by training its members to understand the evolutionary process of public opinion, executing a more aggressive public affairs campaign, increasing the exposure of the military to the public, and increasing pay and benefits for service members. Since the military has not always relied on volunteers to fill its ranks, a brief review of how and why it came to rely on volunteers is provided before the methodology of improving public opinion.

The origin of the all-volunteer military began at Jamestown, Virginia in 1607 when militia companies were formed at the first English settlement. These companies were formed to provide for the common defense of settlers and their homes mostly against Native Americans but also to resist possible raids by the small military forces of

other nearby European colonies. Shortly thereafter, in 1636, the Massachusetts Bay Colony organized three militia regiments to defend against the growing threat of attacks or raids by the Pequot Indians.¹ Pursuant to the organization of these initial units, the US was able to successfully secure the nation using volunteers until it entered World War I. Although President Abraham Lincoln did institute a draft during the American Civil War in 1861 through 1865, people who were drafted, but did not desire to fight could pay someone else to take their place in military service. This led to a disproportionately low number of wealthy people participating in the War Between the States. As the US prepared to enter World War I, the US Army numbered only about 110,000 Soldiers. President Woodrow Wilson called for volunteers to fill the ranks of the Army, but three weeks after entering the war the Army had only enlisted 32,000 volunteers. President Wilson and his Secretary of War, Newton Baker, as a result of this poor response, pushed the Selective Service Act of 1917 through Congress. The difference between this act of conscription and the one employed by President Lincoln was that no person was permitted to provide a substitute for service. Beginning on May 18, 1917 the Selective Service System began registration that would enroll more than 24 million men of whom approximately 2.8 million were involuntarily drafted for service before ending with the war in November of 1918.²

The next time the nation would require a draft would be prior to entering World War II. The Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 would become the first peacetime draft on September 16, 1940 when it was signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This act ultimately resulted in over 10 million men being enrolled in the armed forces to fight during World War II before it expired in 1947.³ A new

selective service act was passed in 1948 and remained in effect until the Vietnam War. From 1948 until 1968, the Selective Service System involuntarily drafted 4,896,683 conscripts into military service.⁴ In 1968, President Richard M. Nixon initiated efforts to eliminate the draft and return to an all-volunteer force in 1973. The requirement to register with the Selective Service System was eliminated in 1975, but was re-established by President Jimmy Carter in 1980 as a response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Subsequent to the return of the all-volunteer military, the US Armed Forces have exhibited their operational excellence and professionalism across the full spectrum of operations on numerous occasions. The proficiency of the all-volunteer military was reflected in Grenada (Urgent Fury), Panama (Just Cause), and culminated in Kuwait (Desert Shield/Desert Storm) when US forces led an international coalition to liberate Kuwait in 1991 resulting in an overwhelming victory over Iraqi forces who had encroached on the sovereignty of a peaceful nation. There are many other examples of successes accomplished by the armed forces volunteers since then and as a result of these successes, the military finds itself in uncharted territory.

Today the US Armed Forces find themselves in a situation unlike any previously encountered. The US military is fighting two unconventional wars simultaneously in Afghanistan and Iraq while concurrently employing forces in support of Small Scale Contingency (SSC) operations throughout the world. Some of these ongoing SSC operations are Security and Stability Operations in Kosovo, Counterterrorism Operations in Trans-Sahara Africa, Coastal Security Operations around Africa, Counterdrug Operations in Columbia, and many others.⁵ All branches of service are completing the most significant organizational transformation since World War II which

is intended to greatly facilitate joint operations and expeditionary operations by synchronizing their duties and responsibilities as well as relocating major units. Among these changes are the establishment of a new Combatant Command - Africa Command, relocation of a Major Command – Forces Command, relocation of two Continental United States Armies – First and Third Army, and relocations of numerous administrative operations and tactical units as a result of Base Closure and Realignment Commission recommendations approved by Congress and the President in November of 2005. President Obama and Vice President Biden support Congressional plans to increase the size of the Army by 65,000 Soldiers and the Marine Corps by 25,000 Marines in order to help units retrain and re-equip properly between deployments and decrease the strain on military families.⁶ However, the ability of the services and their respective recruiters' ability to expedite the integration of these new accessions is limited by the willingness of the population to serve in a branch of the armed forces during a period in which the media is questioning the purpose and duration of the conflicts in which the military is engaged. Essentially, the military has to find a way to sustain itself during the GWOT in which less than one half of one per cent of the American population is deployed in theater to conduct operations in either Afghanistan or Iraq. It appears logical that given the US population of over 305,500,000, as of October 2008, with approximately 60 per cent of the population between the ages of 20 and 64, this would not be a difficult task to accomplish.

The military must constantly strive to improve the way the American public perceives it. It must not allow its image to become permanently tarnished or it will lose the respect and trust of the American population. This loss will ultimately result in the

inability to recruit additional volunteer personnel and retain current service members who are desperately needed to preserve the American way of life. Public opinion of the military has varied significantly over the years from less favorable ratings during and after the Vietnam War to some of the highest ratings immediately after the terrorist attacks of September, 11, 2001.⁷ For instance, "Opinion polls show that the military remains one of the most respected institutions in America. A recent poll showed that American's trust military commanders far more than they did the Bush administration or Congress to bring the war in Iraq to a successful end. Part of the public's perception is based on the notion that the military is a high performance oriented organization."⁸ These public opinion ratings are directly and indirectly affected by actions of members of the armed forces when observed in person by the public or when the media submits its reports in newspapers or on the news. Because of this, it is imperative that members of the military understand the evolutionary process of public opinion.

"Public opinion is not static."⁹ David Yankelovich, who was the Rantoul Fellow in Clinical Psychology at the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and established the public opinion research firm of Yankelovich, Skelly, and White,¹⁰ states people's views about an issue can change over time.¹¹ "Public opinion on any issue develops slowly over a long period – at least ten years for a complex issue."¹² In order to communicate and possibly influence developing opinions, one must know where people are coming from, where they stand in their thinking now, and where they are headed. It is in fact more like a biological process than a physical process (evolutionary), evolving in seven stages.¹³ The stages of development, as described in his theory, are Dawning Awareness, Greater Urgency, Discovering the Choices, Wishful

Thinking, Weighing the Choices, Taking a Stand Intellectually, and Making a Responsible Judgment Morally and Emotionally.

During the first stage, Dawning Awareness, people become aware of an issue or some part of it. They neither are largely unaware of specific facts related to the issue nor are specific facts published by authoritative and respected sources to address the issue and educate the people. People tend to refer to generalizations or make vague references to other remotely related issues which may or may not be appropriate.¹⁴ As an example, people may have heard that the military is failing to meet their endstrength goals, but do not understand what that means or how it impacts them. They may attempt to relate the issue to unemployment statistics or education reform.

The second stage, Greater Urgency, refers to the period when people move from awareness to a sense of urgency that something needs to be done about the issue. This sense is general or vague without specifics, but the overwhelming feeling that someone needs to “Do something!” is elevated. The issue may have existed for years, but now an event has occurred or some other trigger has elevated it to the level of consciousness that invokes a desire for action. As in the previous stage, the event or trigger that causes the increased awareness may or may not be linked by cause and effect to the issue, but the cognitive impact is the same.¹⁵ The next stage in the example above is the panic associated with the events of September, 11, 2001 and the awareness that the country was at risk of additional attacks. The inability of the government and military to prevent the attacks or secure the borders was not related to achieving armed forces endstrengths, but the issue is now a matter of urgent attention.

In stage three, Discovering the Choices, people begin to focus on alternatives for dealing with the issue. They tend to focus on a few limited courses of action (which they may or may not fully understand) proposed by leaders or the media without insisting on additional options. Often the courses of action published by leaders or the media are not the best courses of action. Discovering the Choices is a significant step in the cognitive process as they begin to convert the sense of urgency about the need to “Do something!” into proposals for action.¹⁶ In our scenario, this stage may be exemplified by recommendations to implement the draft in order to achieve endstrengths for border security or mobilize all reserve component forces for force projection into a country believed to be the sponsor of the crisis.

During stage four, Wishful Thinking, the people erect an obstacle of wishful thinking that must be reduced before the people can attack the issue realistically. This occurs because people feel excluded from decision making on matters that affect their lives. In other words, people act most responsibly when they are personally engaged. They feel a sense of urgency about making a change, but have not yet begun to realistically face the difficult decisions that need to be made. To willingly make sacrifices, people must understand why the sacrifices are needed, and they must have some say in the types, forms, and conditions of sacrifice they are asked to make.¹⁷ During this stage in our example, people understand the need for a more robust armed forces, but wishful thinking may dictate the new accessions will come from activation of reservists, recall of previously separated military personnel, or someone else answering the call to duty.

In stage five, Weighing the Choices, people continue to wrestle with the difficult issues of analyzing their values and realize some of the values they hold are contradictory. Attempting to resolve these contradictions is taxing as the public must expend the energy and time in order to understand the courses of action, identify the consequences of each course of action, and reconcile any moral conflicts resulting from this stage. It is unlikely that large segments of the population will ever resolve these internal disputes, but among those who do – they stand to more clearly understand the issues and related options. In the previous stages, the media elevated the issue and the leaders provided potential solutions, in this stage the people must be the ones to determine where they stand with respect to the issue, related solutions, and their beliefs and vital interests. Only the individual can determine how much of a sacrifice he or she is willing to make to resolve the issue.¹⁸ As our example progresses, the people are now at a point where they understand the options provided for resolving the issue, but they are attempting to come to terms with the conflicts of their moral beliefs and values associated with the options. They must determine if they are willing to join the armed forces or allow/support their children joining and suspend their individual liberties and sense of identity in order to maintain a free, safe, and secure nation and the American way of life.

Finally during stages six and seven, Taking a Stand Intellectually and Making a Responsible Judgment Morally and Emotionally, people must “clarify fuzzy thinking, reconcile inconsistencies, consider relevant facts and new realities, and grasp the full consequences of choices. Emotional resolution requires people to confront their own ambivalent feelings, accommodate themselves to unwelcome realities, and overcome

an urge to procrastinate.”¹⁹ Upon reaching a moral decision, the public’s initial thought is to prioritize their needs and wants over the ethical requirements of society. However, once people have had an opportunity to reconsider their choices, they realize the decision they made was not in the best interest of the nation and they typically realign their priorities, try to make the right choice, and do the right thing.²⁰ The last stages of our example find the people attempting to clarify their thoughts regarding enlisting in the armed forces or maintaining their current lifestyle. The choice is difficult because it involves tremendous sacrifice for the public and their families. However, once they have had an opportunity to deliberately reflect on their decision, they will come to a conclusion and select a course of action that best represents the beliefs and moral values instilled in them. Everyone should not be expected to come to the same decision or make the same choice because of differences in their beliefs, cultures, experiences, responsibilities, and thought processes.

Public opinion is an evolutionary process and these seven stages illustrate how it can be influenced. The armed forces must become familiar with this process in order to continue to improve its image with the American population in order to sustain the all-volunteer military. The military must remain cognizant that influencing public opinion is a long term process which may take years. People are constantly re-evaluating their beliefs while trying to understand how new events and information impact those beliefs. Everything the people hear or see regarding the actions, beliefs, culture, and values of the military is a part of this process regardless of whether it is true or not and trying to change or correct a false report is much more difficult than one may think.

In his article, “Persistence of Myths Could Alter Public Policy Approach,” Shankar Vedantam writes that “denials and clarifications, for all their intuitive appeal can paradoxically contribute to the resilience of myths” and “that once an idea has been implanted in people’s minds, it can be difficult to dislodge. Denials inherently require repeating the bad information, which may be one reason they can paradoxically reinforce it.”²¹ He further states that “when accusations or assertions are met with silence, they are more likely to feel true.”²² Therefore, one of the more successful methods of shaping people’s opinions regarding false information is “rather than deny a false claim, it is better to make a completely new assertion that makes no reference to the original myth.”²³ This indicates that the Department of Defense must be aggressive and publish information about the activities of the United States Armed Forces. The more often positive publicity is released and repeated, the more of an impact it makes with regards to influencing public opinion in a positive manner. Since information may not always be positive in nature, being the first to release the information will provide the opportunity to shape initial public opinion regarding the situation instead of having to respond to factually inaccurate reports. These are vital considerations in the effort to improve the public opinion of the armed forces.

Recommendations

The Department of Defense can influence these opinions by employing a strategic communications campaign designed to synchronize the efforts and resources at their disposal “to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable to advance national interests and objectives through the use of coordinated information, themes, plans, programs and actions synchronized with other elements of national power.”²⁴

This is an effort with which the Public Affairs subject matter experts of the Army can assist. The Public Affairs mission is “to keep the American people and the Army informed, and helps to establish the conditions that lead to confidence in America’s Army and its readiness to conduct operations in peacetime, conflict and war.”²⁵ The strategic communications campaign begins with identifying the objective which is to improve public perception of the military in order to increase the quantity and quality of new recruits into the military. This can be accomplished by defining the operational environment and its physical, informational and cognitive dimensions, determining how the public gets their information, reviewing the role of culture as it relates to the message, employing credible messengers, and considering the proposed result to enhance the probability that the message will change perceptions, increase credibility and trust, and gain support of the population.²⁶ The next step is to increase the exposure of the armed forces personnel to the public at large.

The military must increase its exposure and interaction with the population. Most military forces spend the majority of their time either training on a military installation or deployed out of the country in support of military operations. Most of the extremely limited interaction these personnel have with the public is of an informal nature such as attending church, coaching children’s athletic activities, or as neighbors living in communities near the military installation of assignment. The type of interaction the military should strive to accomplish is for the public to observe the military member performing his or her duty. This interaction has historically been conducted in a limited number of ways such as performing funeral details for veterans, participating in holiday parades, presenting the national colors at sporting events, hosting air shows, etc. What

is needed is an extended interaction and continuous engagement by military members with the public. As an example, Bob Johansen who regularly participates in leadership seminars for civilians at the US Army War College shares his initial opinions of the military in his book *Get There Early*. He states “I had very little experience with the military before I began these exchanges, and I had a rather negative view of it: I thought of it as hierarchical and out of touch. Now, having done many of these exchanges, I have come away with great respect for our military and how they are learning to learn.”²⁷ The military currently has personnel working in numerous government agencies such as the Center for Disease Control, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and State Department as liaison officers and planners. The military must expand this program beyond the governmental agencies to include non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the American Red Cross, Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), World Trade Organization, and others. Once this accomplished, the military needs to further expand into cooperative agreements for integrating its members into private industry as well. Integrating active duty service members in the workforce with their civilian counterparts would greatly assist with influencing public opinion in a positive manner as citizens learn more about the values and work ethics held by those serving in the military. There are a growing number of corporations that specifically target former military members for employment in the private sector. These businesses are willing and even eager to hire service members as employees because of the favorable opinion garnered by the military which is related to the ethics engrained during their military service. This, combined with the knowledge, skills, and abilities learned while in the military sets the conditions for service members to be more successful in

their transitions to jobs after military service. “The military's high esteem in civil society is evidenced by the high level of success former service members have when they leave the military.” Former service members are offered jobs in the civilian sector and many go on to be very successful leaders in their new roles.²⁸

According to James Vega, a strategist for the Democratic National Party, attitudes of ordinary Americans toward the military are rooted in their personal experiences such as prior service in the military or relationship with a friend or family member who is now or recently served in the military. These attitudes are comprised of two components – a value system and a conceptual framework. The value system includes familiar concepts such as bravery, conformity, discipline, obedience, patriotism, and a commitment to something more important than money and violence. The conceptual framework is one which is deeply internalized by the military member. This framework is described as the mission and the strategy to accomplish the mission.²⁹ A senior Army Officer, Colonel William M. Darley, who has served as the editor in chief of Military Review at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, the Public Affairs officer for the US Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force base, Florida, and a host of other public affairs assignments affirms the concept of personal experiences influencing opinions in an article in which he writes “The most powerful moral influence affecting public support for the military is found not in the textured and calculated words of the nations spokespersons reciting rote messages, but in exposure to the selfless, discipline, integrity, courage, technical military competence, and basic decency of our service members. Though relatively passive in approach, media access to our service members together with honesty and forthright release of information in a timely fashion

has proven to be among the most powerful elements of perception influence the military has with regard to garnering the public trust and support for the military even during periods of domestic political acrimony and unrest.”³⁰ There are many examples of military leaders which illustrate this ideology.

Among one of the most recent examples is Army General David H. Petraeus who sponsored the “surge” in Iraq. Subsequent to the successful execution of troop increases and the related drop in violence in Iraq he was selected as one of the world's top 100 public intellectuals by both Foreign Policy and Prospect magazines, named the Static Line Association Man of the Year 2008, and announced as one of Time Magazine’s 100 most influential leaders of the year as well as one of its four runners up for Person of the Year.³¹ While he certainly captured the favor of the media and the population, he has yet to endear himself to certain members of Congress such as the Senate majority Leader Harry Reid and Florida Representative Robert Wexler during Congressional testimony in September 2007 regarding the status of the war in Iraq.³²

Another recent example of a military leader who positively influenced public opinion is Lieutenant General Russel L. Honoré who may be best known for serving as commander of Joint Task Force Katrina and coordinating military relief efforts across the Gulf Coast in response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. His arrival in New Orleans coupled with the management style by which he emphasized a sense of urgency contrasted with that of the civilian leadership who failed to produce results related their promises of relief. On September 1, 2005 Mayor Ralph Nagin provided a radio interview in which he said “Now, I will tell you this - and I give the President some credit on this - he sent one John Wayne dude down here that can get some stuff done, and his name is

[Lt.] Gen. [Russel] Honoré. And he came off the doggone chopper, and he started cussing and people started moving. And he's getting some stuff done."³³

In the event one may believe this is a relatively recent phenomenon related to increased media coverage and the instantaneous communications capability related to the internet, General George C. Marshall was held in the highest esteem by the public as well as politicians. In his book *George C. Marshall; Soldier Statesman of the American Century*, Mark A. Stoler writes "Not since Washington had Americans so trusted a soldier, and never in U.S. history has a man enjoyed such respect on Capitol Hill."³⁴ Unlike George Washington, however, he was a man with no intention of running for public office and when approached about running for president in 1941, he quickly dismissed the idea and told those who had inquired that "Putting such an idea into a man's head is the first step toward destroying his usefulness, the public suggestion of such an idea, even by rumor or gossip, would be almost fatal to my interests."³⁵ He possessed the same general feelings with regards to awards, decorations, and honorary degrees which when combined with his lack of ambition for political office reinforced the awe and respect in which he was held.³⁶ It is no wonder that given the unilateral favorable opinion bestowed on him by Americans that General Marshall was named the Man of the Year by Time magazine in 1944.

The military must also continue to work with Congress to ensure disabled and retired veterans receive all of their benefits to include the highest quality of care available as well as increasing the pay and benefits of members now assigned to the different branches of the armed forces. The direct results of these actions would be increased retention rates among currently serving service members and increased

accessions of pending new members. The indirect results of these actions would be increased positive media coverage and improved public opinion.

According to the US Casualty Status report as of January 16, 2009, there have been 17,325 US personnel wounded and returned to duty and another 13, 635 US personnel wounded and not returned to duty for a total of 30,960 requiring medical care and treatment related to Operation Iraqi Freedom. As of the same period there have been another 933 wounded and returned to duty and 1,715 wounded and not returned to duty totaling 2,648 US personnel related to Operation Enduring Freedom. These numbers do not include the personnel who have (or will develop) Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or another military service related disorder or injury related to combat operations. By some accounts, the number of personnel with PTSD could exceed 850,000 veterans.³⁷

All of these personnel and their dependents could potentially be entitled to receive medical care and treatment at one of a variety of government operated medical facilities. However, according to the Department of Defense “Between FY 1987 and FY 2002, the Military Health System reduced from 163 hospital and 583 clinics to 75 hospitals and 461 clinics” while the Veterans Affairs had 171 hospitals nationwide in 1993; by 2003 there was 163³⁸ thereby reducing the access to medical care for those who have earned it. In an effort to improve this situation, the Senate and House of Representatives have introduced bills that would assure sufficient, timely, and predictable funding for veterans’ health care programs – an idea favored by more than 80 per cent of America’s voters.³⁹ This appears to be an overwhelming indication that the US population feels very strongly the commitment to provide healthcare benefits to

service members should be continued and improvements made to the existing structure of service providers. Other benefits which need to be evaluated for improvement include pay and survivor benefits.

The current pay scale for service members is in dire need of revision. There are several ways in which the current pay scale could be improved upon to improve public perception, recruiting, and retention. For example, paying civilian contractors to do the same work military personnel do for a fraction of the cost is bad for morale, a gross waste of money, and causes competition for limited personnel resources. The service member should be afforded the same pay as the contractor or the contractor should be relocated to another area of operations. Other issues surrounding compensation include overtime and responsibility. Many service personnel routinely work ten and twelve hour days with many exceeding that on a regular basis. The military needs to develop and implement an escalating bonus-based pay system that coincides with performance and responsibility as all personnel of the same grade do not perform the same duties nor possess the same professional responsibilities. Police departments and federal law enforcement agencies do this routinely and it appears to be an effective tool for them.⁴⁰

Disability and survivor benefits for military personnel are much lower than those for personnel in the private sector. Noted economist and financial experts Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes state “the dollar amounts paid to younger veterans and those with severe mental disabilities do not come anywhere close to matching what they could have earned.”⁴¹ A recent analysis by the Veterans Disability Benefits Commission quantified this statement and found that “VA benefits only covered 69% of the income a 35-year old vet with a mental health disability could have expected to earn had the vet

not become impaired. As for vets suffering 100% mental disability, the gap between what they might have earned and what Uncle Sam pays them over their lifetime is about \$3.6 million.”⁴² The impact of this is one in five families of wounded returning veterans’ have had to change or quit their jobs in order to attend to the wounded because of insufficient benefits. The military must resolve these issues regarding inequitable compensation between its military members and private industry and communicate the solutions to the American population via the media as part of the strategic communications plan.

Conclusion

The Department of Defense must develop, publish, and execute a synchronized plan regarding improving public opinion to support the all-volunteer military. Among the primary areas which need to be emphasized in this effort is a strategic communications plan. This aggressive public affairs campaign must be waged to accurately report current military activities throughout the spectrum of operations, highlight opportunities available to those who join the armed forces, publish force structure requirements (vacancies), highlight contributions made by members of the military to society, as well as tell the proud history of the military and its members such as Audie Murphy, who was the most highly decorated Soldier in World War II as well as an accomplished actor starring in over 40 American films, Colin Powell, who was a Vietnam veteran that became the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and after retiring from the military became the Secretary of State, and George C. Marshall cited earlier, among others. The public also needs increased exposure to the members of the armed forces. The people of this great nation must see the members of the military on a regular basis so

they get to know them and observe the ethics, skills, and values reinforced by military service in order to garner a favorable public image which influences public opinion so dramatically. The public needs to understand the sacrifices made by service members and their families. Embedding military members in other governmental agencies, non-governmental agencies, and in the private sector where possible is a valuable opportunity to expose service members to the public. The Department of Defense should also work diligently to increase the pay and benefits afforded to service members and ensure the increases and improvements are widely published in order to improve public opinion. Every American should know that service members will receive a competitive salary and benefits package that rivals that of their counterparts in the private sector. It should be clear to all people that in the event of injury or death while serving the nation, the soldier will receive the best medical care and treatment available in the nation and their family's futures will be secure. Finally, the armed forces must ensure all members are trained and familiar with how important public opinion is and how vital it is to improve the public's perception of the military. If the military fails to sustain or improve upon the favorable public opinion it has secured, the future of the nation may be at stake.

Endnotes

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